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The House of Burgess: ‘Is this the real life?’

Insanity holds court in wake of tragedy

By Rob Burgess
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In the days and weeks after the Dec. 14 tragedy in Newtown, Conn., where 28 human beings were slaughtered by firearms, we as a nation held a serious, adult debate about the future of guns in America.

Of course, I’m kidding. Actually, the country lost its collective mind.

If the gun debate the country is currently embroiled in were a movie genre, several of the more popular viewpoints could be accurately filed under the

“fantasy” heading. Magical realism as a concept seems to play heavily into some people’s viewpoints on gun control. And all this hysteria means profits to some, including companies like Amendment II, Bullet Blocker and BulletProofMe.com.

“Since the tragedy, there’s even been a surge in demand for little-known products that can literally bullet-proof children,” reported CNN’s Miguel Marquez. “From backpack inserts to bullet-resistant toddler pants, parents are going to extremes to keep their kids from becoming statistics.”

Other flights of fancy play to a more offensive, rather than a defensive, mindset. On Jan. 9, James Yeager, the CEO of Tactical Response, a Tennessee-based company specializing in weapons and tactical training, posted a video on the company’s website in response to the (untrue) idea that Vice President Joseph Biden would encourage the use of executive orders to re-ban assault rifles. To describe his demeanor as “unhinged” would be putting it lightly.

“I’m telling you that if that happens, it’s going to spark a civil war, and I’ll be glad to fire the first shot,” he said into the camera. “I’m not putting up with it. You shouldn’t put up with it. And I need all you patriots to start thinking about what you’re going to do, load your … mags, make sure your rifle’s clean, pack a backpack with some food in it and get ready to fight. …

I’m not letting my country be ruled by a dictator. I’m not letting anybody take my guns! If it goes one inch further, I’m going to start killing people.”

Fantastical thinking isn’t just relegated to those with an economic incentive to keep all manner of firepower accessible. It has apparently also infected certain corners of academia. James Tracy, a tenured associate professor at Florida Atlantic University, publicly wondered on his personal blog, The Memory Hole, if the massacre even happened at all.

“While it sounds like an outrageous claim, one is left to inquire whether the Sandy Hook shooting ever took place — at least in the way law enforcement authorities and the nation’s news media have described,” he wrote on Dec. 24.

After positing that Dr. H. Wayne Carver, Connecticut’s chief medical examiner, and others might have been replaced by paid actors, Tracy further questioned whether President Barack Obama himself may have orchestrated the incident.

“Regardless of where one stands on the Second Amendment and gun control, it is not unreasonable to suggest the Obama administration complicity or direct oversight of an incident that has in very short order sparked a national debate on the very topic — and not coincidentally

remains a key piece of Obama's political platform," he wrote.

A tragedy like Newtown necessarily sends everyone's emotions into overdrive. How could it not? But while we're all letting our imaginations run wild, the body count, sadly, keeps climbing. Slate Magazine and the Twitter feed @GunDeaths have been keeping a running tally of all the firearms-related deaths in the country since Newtown. As of this writing, their unofficial count sits at 812. And according to the latest data compiled by the Violence Policy Center, you are now more likely to die from a gunshot would than an automobile accident in 10 states: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Michigan, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and, yes, Indiana. The report outlines 735 gun deaths in Indiana in 2009, compared to 715 motor vehicle deaths.

Those are facts. This is reality. You are dreaming if you think you're going to emerge victorious in a shootout with the federal government. (Do you have unmanned drones, tanks or battleships at your disposal like the military does? I didn't think so.) You are dreaming if you think Obama himself is responsible for violent attacks like Newtown. You are dreaming if you think that bullet-resistant toddler pants are going to save your child's life. Wake up. We've got a real problem here.

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